

National News

IT IS FASCINATING how a single photographic image can generate a whole range of thoughts and interpretations. Take Derek Biermann's photograph of dancer Kathryn Dunn in Gideon Obarzanek's *Fast Idol*. I love the sense of movement seen in the swing of the hair, and the shimmer and subtle motion of the costume. I like to imagine I can hear a jangle coming from the metallic strips of the costume. Yet others are struck by the sense of stillness in the image. The dancer's eyes are cast down and her head is lowered, contained, as it were, in the cradle of her arms. Some find it highly unusual as a representation of the work of Obarzanek, whose choreography now looks quite different from the way it did in 1995, when *Fast Idol* was made. 'Is that really from an Obarzanek work?' they say. Fans of Dunn admire it for the way it encapsulates her dancerly qualities. Others just like it because it's a sexy image. What will history make of it?

Biermann's image, published recently in the National Library publication, *A Collector's Book of Australian Dance* (reviewed in the April 2003 issue of *ABR*), is one of many thousands of dance photographs in the Library. The National Library has a superb and constantly growing dance collection that crosses its unique collecting areas. There are pictures, oral histories, manuscripts, assorted ephemera and notated scores, in addition to regular printed material. Since 1988 the development of the collection has been fostered, in particular, by the Library's involvement in three collaborative ventures: the Esso Performing Arts and Oral History Archive Project; Keep Dancing!, an Australia Council funded partnership between the Library, ScreenSound Australia and Ausdance, the peak industry body for dance in Australia; and Australia Dancing, a second Australia Council funded partnership with Ausdance.

Probably the most significant outcome of the recent collaboration, Australia Dancing, is the development of a new web-based service designed to make Australia's dance materials accessible to a wide audience across the country and across the globe. The service is a portal at <http://www.australiadancing.org>, with three distinct zones. The primary zone, the directory of resources, describes dance research materials held by the National Library, ScreenSound Australia and other selected institutions. Some of this

material is directly accessible in digital formats — as digitised pictures, for example. Some information is available as electronic finding aids, such as online descriptions of the contents of manuscript and ephemera collections. Progressively more material is being made available in these ways, and there are plans to deliver audio and moving images via the Australia Dancing service. The infrastructure to support such developments is currently being developed. Other plans include expansion of the directory component of the portal to include dance resource material from other major institutions in Australia.

The directory service is supplemented by other pages enabling discovery, location and access to information about dance in Australia through links to other relevant sites, and through current industry information provided by Ausdance and available on the Ausdance website. The portal delivers high quality information about Australian dance and its artists, much of which has been difficult to locate and access. For further searching, users can move seamlessly from their search enquiry to other national and international online services, such as the catalogue of the Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, or PictureAustralia, the Internet-based service giving access to many significant online pictorial collections.

Dance is a uniquely ephemeral art form, widely regarded as having few written and other documentary resources compared with other areas of the arts. Ephemeral it certainly is in the sense that the moment of its performance is the moment of its disappearance. Yet the Australia Dancing portal is already a rich and innovative service providing substantial online information that indicates that there is more to dance than that disappearing moment. The new Australia Dancing portal was launched in February 2003. Statistics collected since its launch suggest that the site is likely to receive about 80,000 visits during 2003. Would you like to know more about Robert Helpmann, or Meryl Tankard, or why the image of Kathryn Dunn surprises admirers of Gideon Obarzanek's work? Australia Dancing can help.

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